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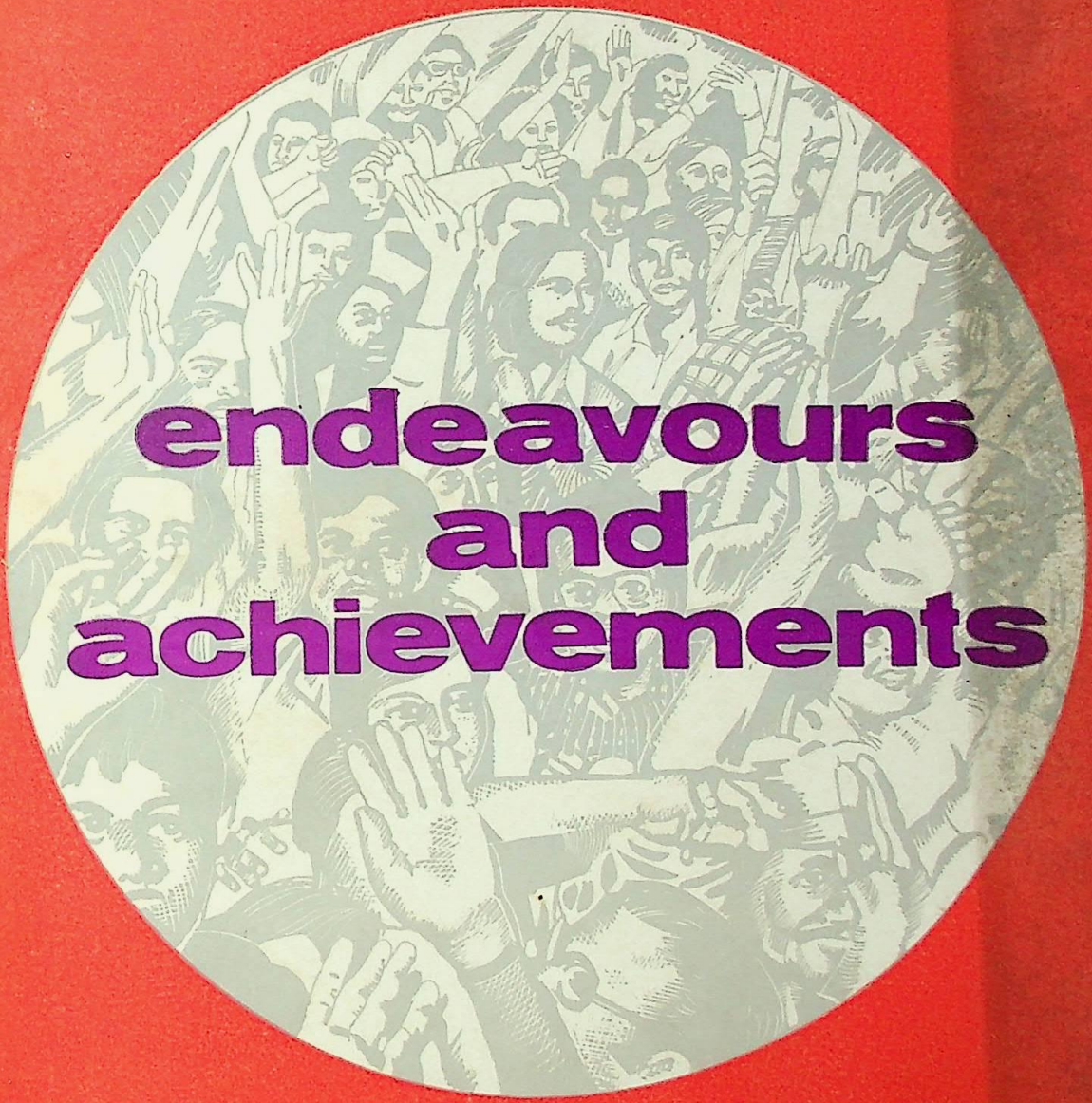

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Endeavours and Achievements

The world's largest democracy has now mounted a real assault on poverty, and is taking concrete steps to raise the standard of living and improve the quality of life of its teeming millions. All the major ingredients, conducive to accelerate the pace of economic growth and build a socially well-integrated community, are in evidence. Under the Janata Government's watchful guidance, a free and open society has evolved in India in the last two years. The parliamentary democratic system has successfully combated the challenges of the times, and the economy has displayed unprecedented resilience. Public morale is high.

The Janata Government came to power in the March 1977 elections, on the crest of a popular wave of resentment against the forces of dictatorship. The new government was committed not only to undo the wrongs of the earlier years but also to introduce an administration whose foundations were laid on concepts of morality and cleanliness in public life.

The series of measures taken by the Government to restore to the people their democratic rights, which were abridged during the emergency, has unleashed a fresh wave of popular aspirations; it has also created a free climate for articulating them. The unrestrained expression of demands and the discontent repressed during the emergency has brought in its wake unrest on many fronts which the administration has had to meet effectively, but with understanding and sympathy.

This, of course, has placed onerous responsibilities on the leadership, due to a number of factors inherent in the situation.

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Back from the Brink

In principle and practice, the Government endeavoured to remove the distortions that had crept into our social and economic life due to neglect of the guidelines ordained by the Constitution and led to a potentially explosive accumulation of suppressed discontent.

Democratic processes have been freed from the shackles of emergency, the notorious MISA has been repealed and the rule of law has been restored. Both Houses of Parliament have passed the Constitution 45th Amendment Bill and it is now being ratified by State Legislatures. The Judiciary has been restored its dignity and put back on the pedestal from which various forces had conspired to bring it down. Cleaner public life is being ensured by legislative and other measures.

The press is free again. The passing of the Parliamentary Proceedings (Protection of Publication) Bill has given back to journalists the immunity in reporting parliamentary proceedings of which they had been deprived. The Prevention of Publication of Objectionable Matters Act has been repealed. The Press Council has been revived. The credibility of Radio and TV has been restored and the official mass media have been made freely accessible to all political parties for election publicity.

The weaker sections of society received much lip sympathy ever since the achievement of Independence. The Government has now taken concrete steps to set up institutional machinery to ensure that social justice is extended to them on a continuing basis. The Minorities Commission and the Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes have been set up to look into the grievances and the felt needs of these sections of the population, to safeguard their interests and rights under the Constitution and to help in the implementation of the civil rights legislation existing on the statute book. Examination of measures for the development and welfare of the economically and socially backward classes is also being undertaken.

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Economic Development

There is a large body of opinion to the effect that economic development is the main key to social uplift. The Janata Government's economic policies are in the nature of a frontal attack on the problems of poverty and mass unemployment, particularly in the rural areas.

The country's economic planning now reflects this primary concern of the Government and the basic approach has been endorsed by the National Development Council.

It will be recalled that the Government reconstituted the Planning Commission in 1977 and asked it to work on the Five Year Plan for 1978-83 under the new Rolling Plan concept which will enable continuous monitoring of achievements and appropriate modifications for the future. The new philosophy of planning makes in many respects a radical departure from the past. An important feature of the Plan outlays for the period 1978-83 is the shift towards higher outlays in the States sector, which now exceed the outlay in the Central sector, being about Rs. 5,985 crores in 1978-79 as against the Central Plan of Rs. 5,664 crores. The primacy given by government to rural development is reflected in raising the total outlay in the 1978-83 Plan for Rural Development to about 43 per cent as against 37.5 per cent in the Fifth Plan period.

An important component of the development strategy is the 'Food for Work' programme launched in 1977. Nearly two lakh tonnes of foodgrains were distributed last year, through the States, under this programme. The target for 1978-79 is 10 lakh tonnes. The total combined investment by the Centre and the States in the programme will exceed Rs. 200 crore and will create 400 million man-days of work in a single year.

Government attaches great importance to speedy implementation of land reform measures. The protection afforded by the Ninth Schedule of the Constitution is to be extended to all new land reform laws. Up to

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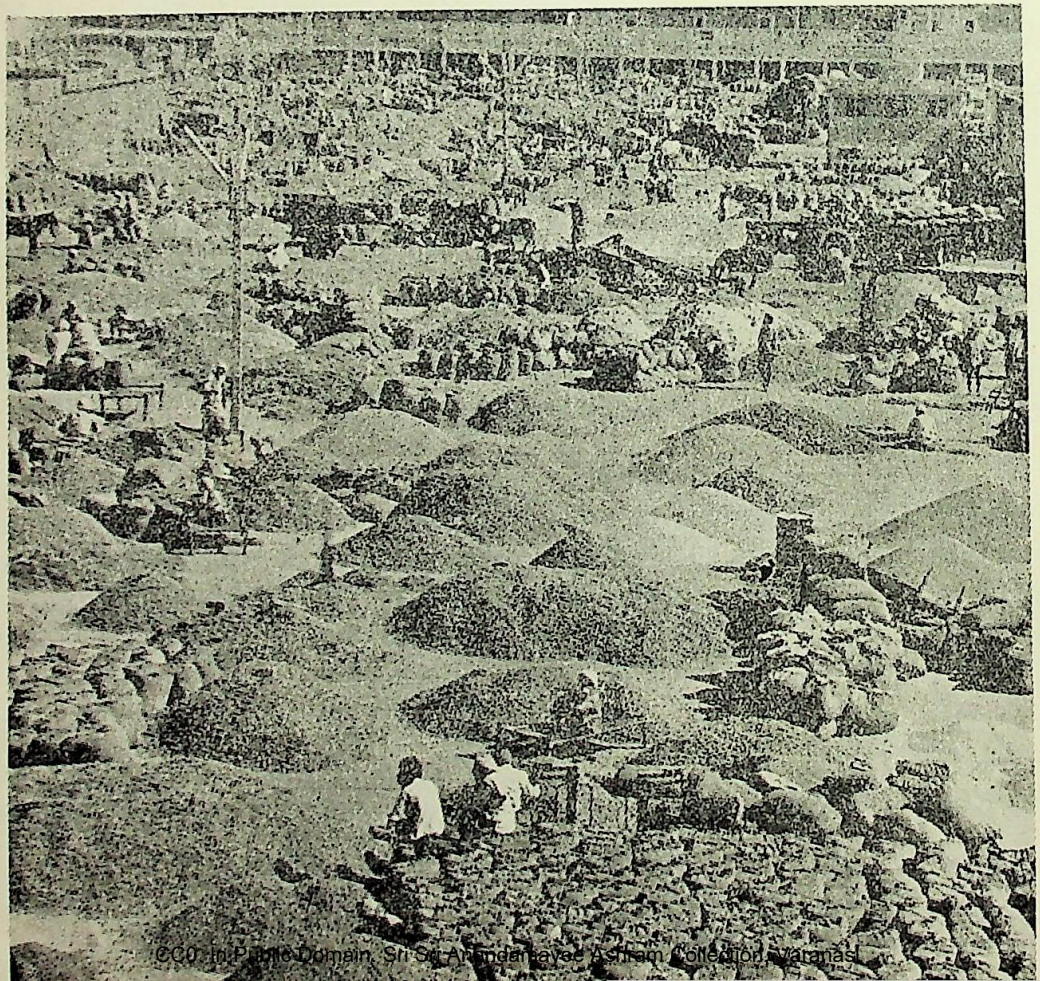
November 1978, 6.48 lakh hectares of land had been distributed to the landless. More than 50 per cent of the beneficiaries belonged to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

Agricultural production registered a significant jump in 1977-78 with the output of foodgrains touching the level of 125.6 million tonnes. This was 14.4 million tonnes higher than in the previous year. The marked increase symbolises the strengthening of the productive potential and its

Record production of foodgrains



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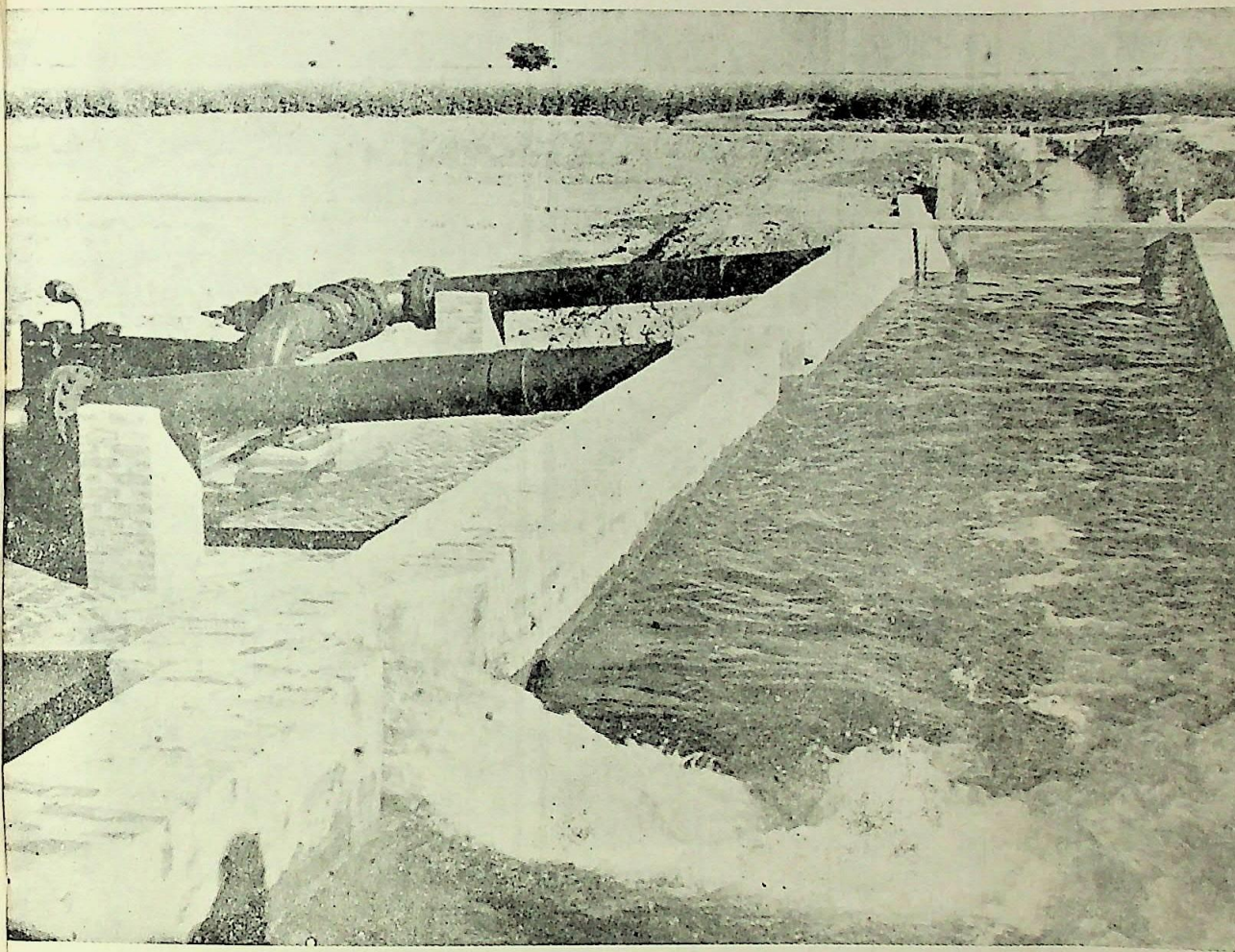

More cultivable land brought under irrigation—2.6 million hectares in a single year

tendency to stabilise at higher levels. Despite devastating floods over large parts of the country the production will be marginally better in 1978-79.

The creation of additional irrigation potential of 2.6 million hectares in 1977-78 is the highest ever achieved by any country in a single year. The target for 1978-79 is still higher at 2.8 million hectares. The consumption of fertilisers in 1977-78 estimated at 4.29 million tonnes has shown a record 26 per cent increase over the previous year: nearly 875,000 tonnes of

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NPK alone were poured into the soil in one year—the biggest consumption figure for any country in the world. The consumption during 1978-79 is expected to be higher by 18 per cent over 1977-78 figures. Sugar production has achieved a new peak of 6.47 million tonnes, an increase of nearly 34 per cent over the previous year's record. Consumption of sugar has increased by 20 per cent during a year to nearly 4.5 million tonnes. The high production has enabled the removal of controls on distribution and prices and has resulted in a perceptible fall in sugar prices.

Industrial Upsurge

The rate of growth of industrial production has been as high as eight per cent in recent months. This was a result of the implementation of the Janata Government's new Industrial Policy which aims at an integrated development of industry with the major accent on building up the small, medium and 'tiny' sectors, and encouragement to the public sector.

The rate of industrial growth in the coming years will be even higher. Steel production has risen by nearly 6 per cent over the previous year, while electricity generation has gone up by 13 per cent. Production of fertilisers, commercial vehicles and aluminium has exceeded previous figures. The production of commercial vehicles has gone up to 60,000 this year as against 34,000 two years ago. Wiser by the experience of the last two years, the government has evolved a strategy to meet the overall requirements of the country in certain hard core sectors like fertilisers, oil and gas, cement, paper, aluminium and other non-ferrous metals so that future shortages can be avoided. Incentives have been offered to entrepreneurs wishing to set up mini cement plants upto 2000 tonnes daily capacity. New guidelines have been evolved for the take-over of 'sick' units.

In order to create employment opportunities through development of decentralised rural, small and cottage industries, the Government is setting

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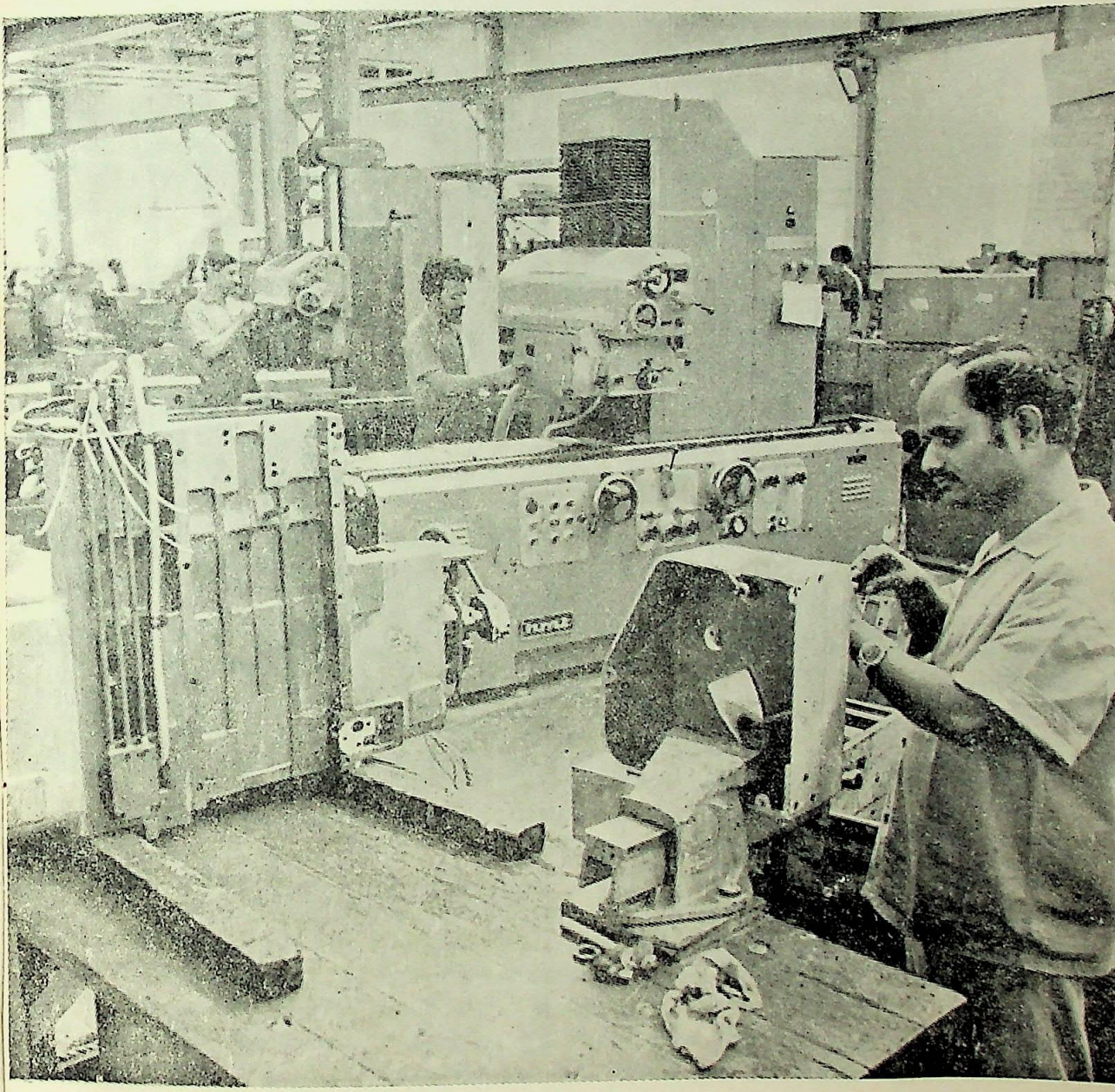

Hindustan Machine Tools—surface grinding machine assembly

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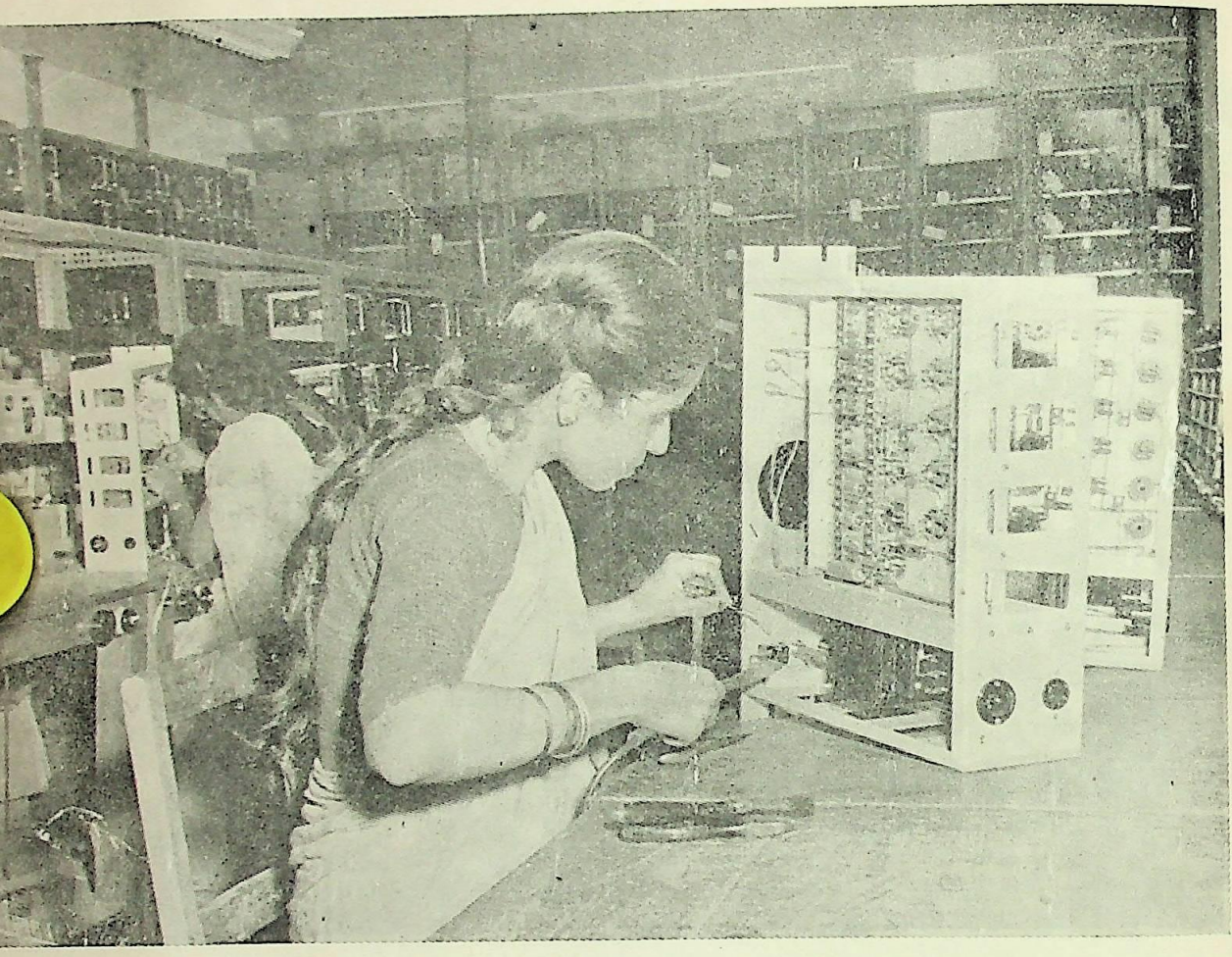

Women technicians at work at Bharat Electronics Ltd.

up district industries centres in every district of the country. About 250 such centres have been sanctioned so far, and the rest are proposed to be set up in the coming year. The assistance programmes of the Khadi and Village Industries Commission have been strengthened. The number of items reserved for exclusive development in the small sector has been increased from 504 to 807, and legislation to provide protection to small and cottage industries is proposed to be undertaken. Investment in Khadi, cottage industries and small-scale industries is now four times as high as it was under the previous government.

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Relief to the Consumer

The increased foodgrains and industrial production is reflected in price-levels remaining stable, and essential commodities and consumer goods being easily available throughout the country. The wholesale price index moved within a narrow range of less than 2 per cent during the greater part of the current year. In fact, the index for April-October, 1978 was, on an average, 1.1 per cent lower than that for the same months of 1977, which itself was a period of relative price stability. Price stability has been achieved through monetary and fiscal discipline, appropriate pricing policies, increased production, availability of essential consumer items like edible oils through imports, and regulation of export of essential commodities.

The steps taken by the Government to remove unnecessary controls are bearing fruit. The removal of restrictions on movement of foodgrains and relaxations in the industrial licensing and import policies and procedures have led to benefits both to producers and consumers.

The most heart-warming development, however, is that for the first time since freedom, food imports have been totally stopped from 1978-79; foodgrains taken on loan have been returned and outstandings against earlier food purchases wiped out.

Procurement prices of some agricultural commodities have been raised to give an impetus to higher production. However, such hikes in prices have been made without raising the prices for the consumer.

Gone are the days of scarcity of essential commodities, thanks to the expansion of the public distribution system to cover larger areas and more items of consumption in the rural sector. The Government has also made arrangements to set up fair price shops in all villages with a population of 2,000.

The overall performance of the economy has been most encouraging.

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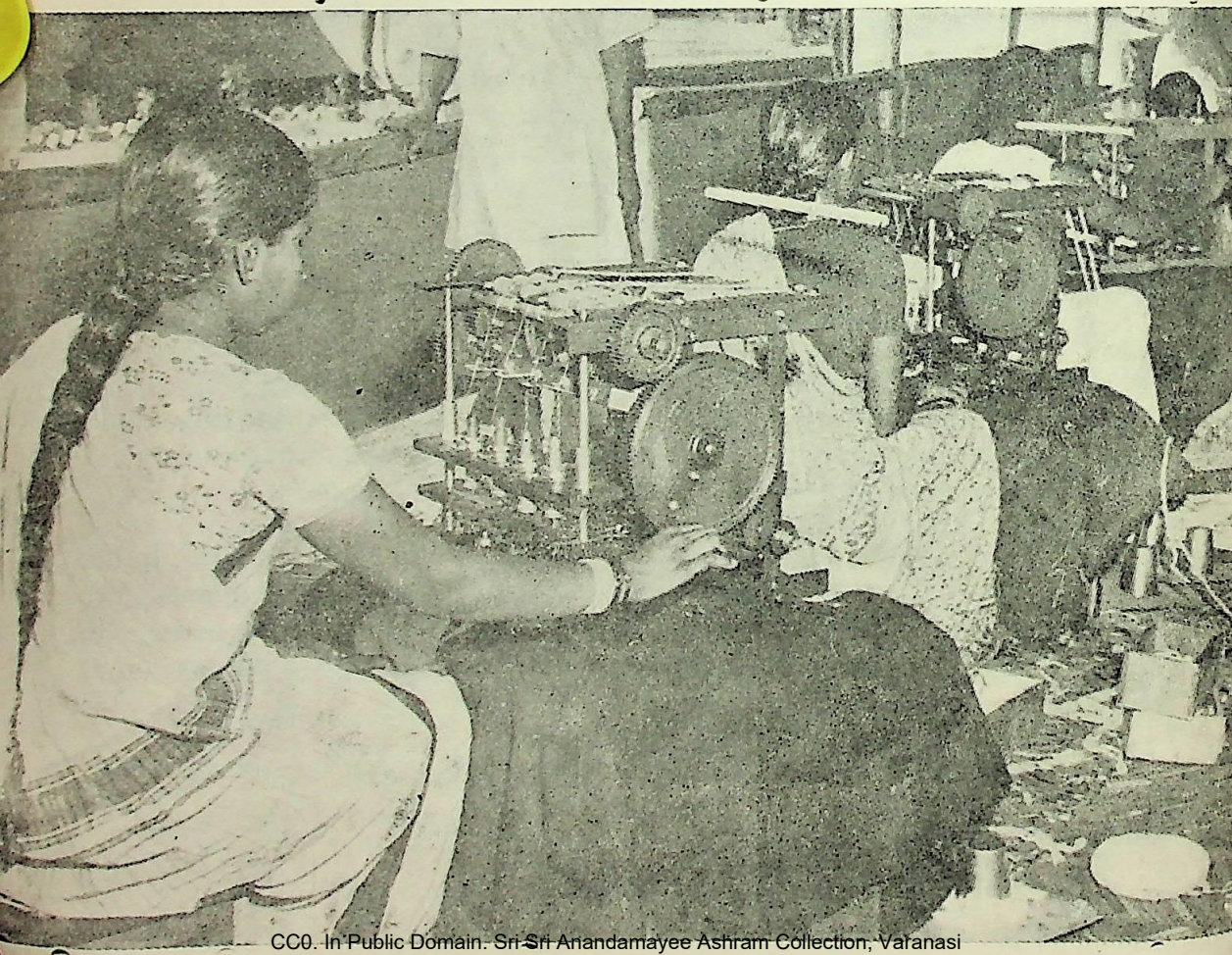
The growth impulses generated in 1977-78 have been carried forward and the economy is well set on the path of growth. A growth rate of 3.5 per cent in the Gross National Product has been estimated for 1978-79 which is not an inconsiderable achievement coming as it did on top of a very high rate of growth of 7.2 per cent in 1977-78.

Despite a marginal shortfall in exports due to the protectionist measures in developed countries and a spurt of over 20% in imports due to the liberalised import policy of the Government the foreign exchange reserves (excluding gold and SDR's) have crossed the Rs. 5,000 crore mark and stood at Rs. 5,094.74 crore on 28.2.79.

Modernisation of cottage industries. Picture shows a four spindle spinning wheel.



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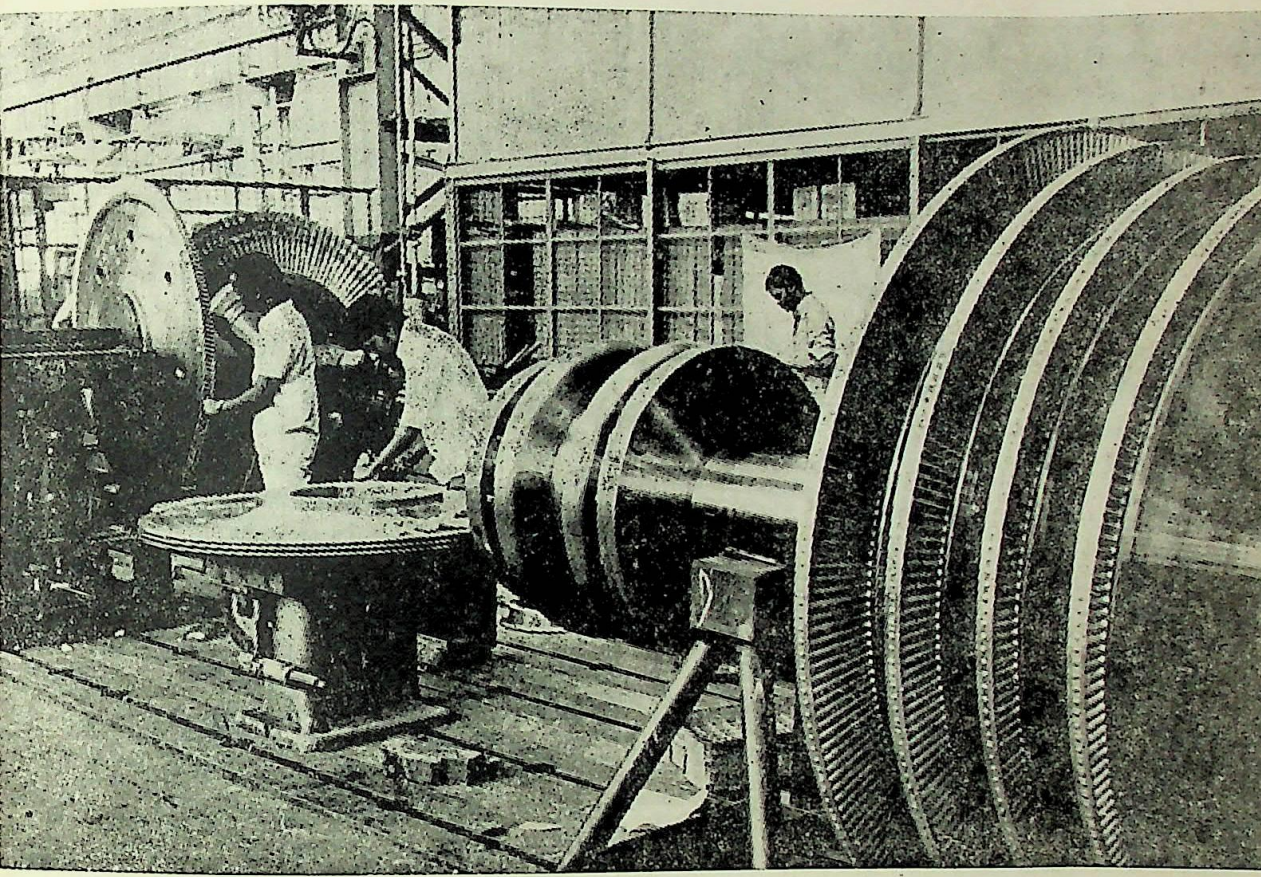

Bharat Heavy Electricals Plant at Hardwar—turbine wheels assembly

"In the light of these statistics we can lay claim that the country's economy today is in much better shape than what we inherited in the past and holds forth promise of further improvement", the Prime Minister observed recently, adding that this "would enable us to fulfil our commitment of making a substantial dent into the problems of poverty and unemployment by the end of the current Plan. If all goes well thereafter", the Prime Minister wrote, "we shall achieve a reasonable measure of culmination of these perennial features in our economic life by the end of the stipulated 10-year period."

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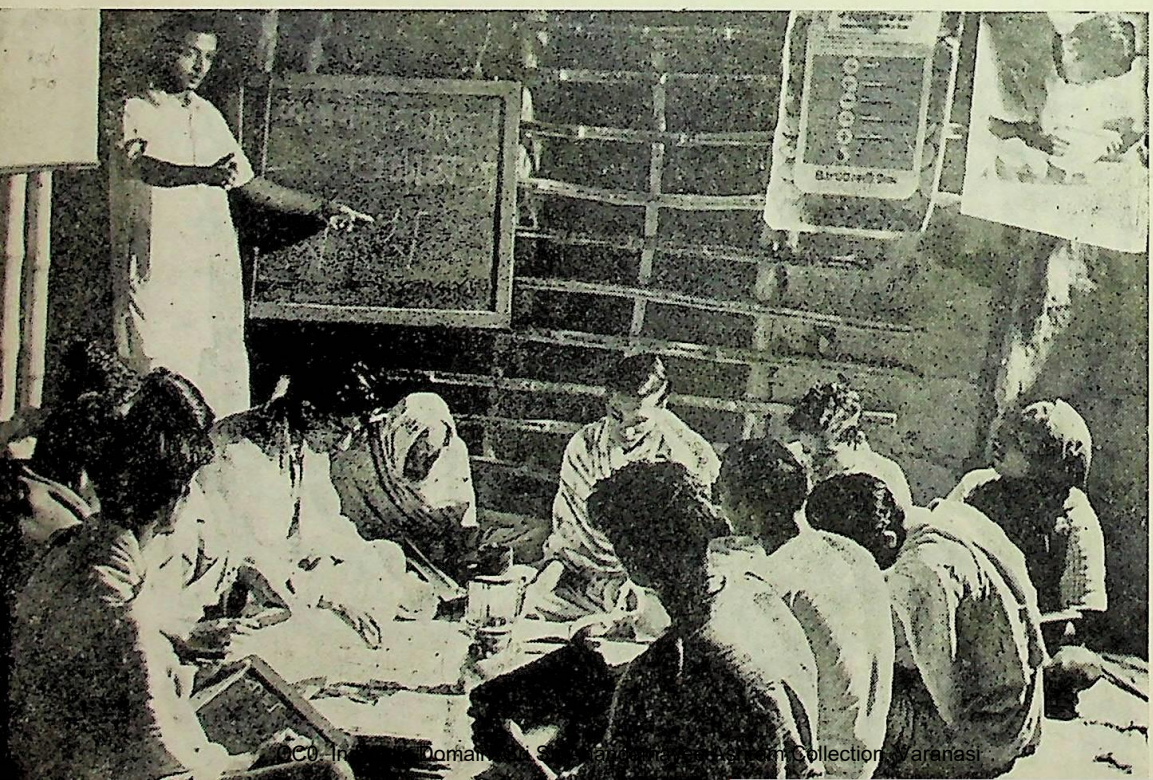
Social Responsibility

While economic endeavour gets the priority it deserves, the government is deeply conscious of the fact that the Directive Principles of State Policy embodied in the Constitution are the bedrock on which all economic policies and programmes must rest. Efforts to increase the GNP must be accompanied by improvement in the quality of life.

To fulfil this social responsibility, the government is paying special attention to the eradication of untouchability, curbing the curse of intoxicants, educating the child and the adult, and carrying all the amenities of civilization to the rural population.

A massive National Adult Education Programme has been launched

Wiping out the darkness of illiteracy. A massive adult literracy campaign has been launched



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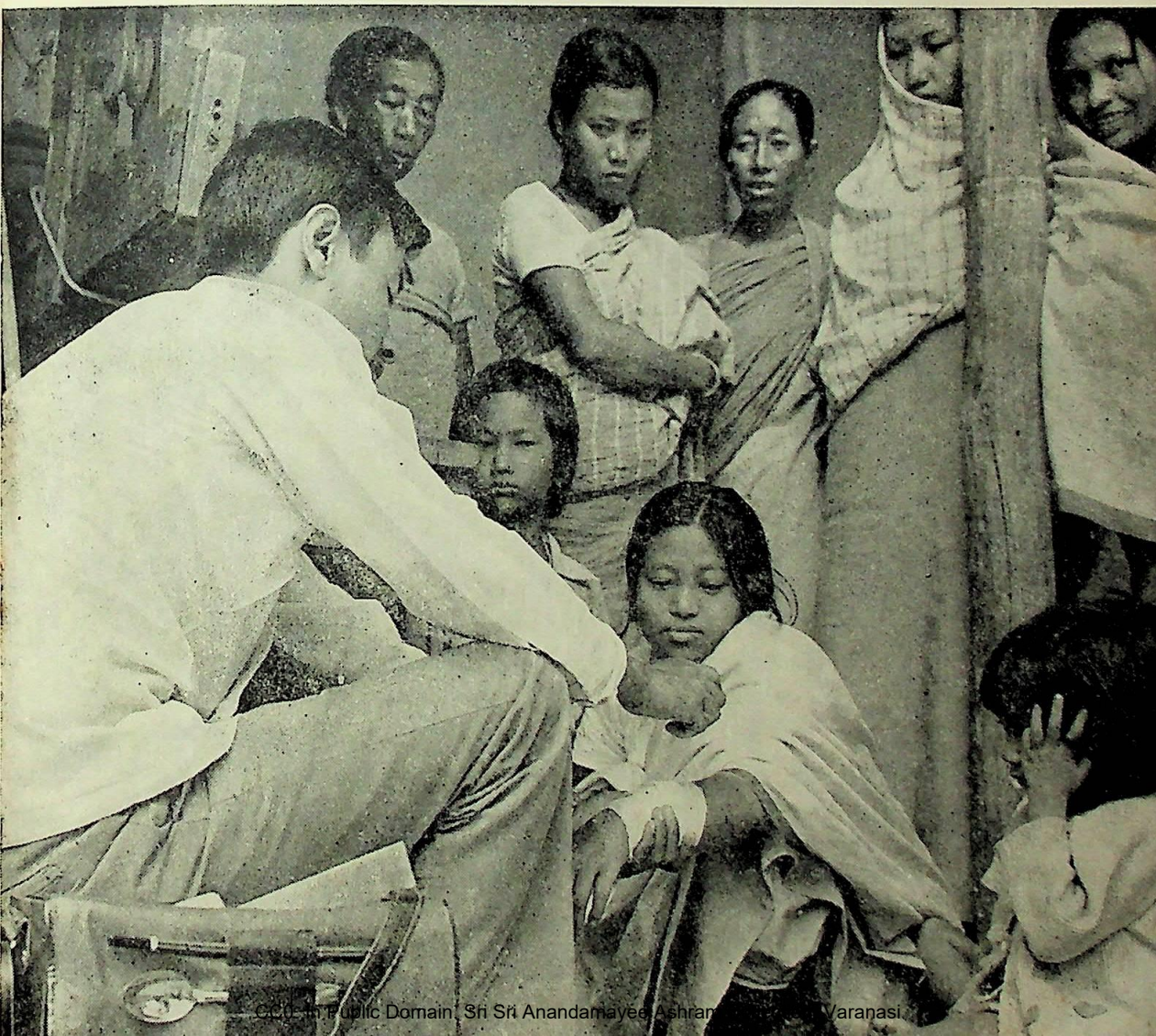
to cover 100 million adult illiterates in the next five years. A programme to universalise elementary education within the next decade is also being put into operation. Concurrently, programmes have been initiated to recast the content of education at all stages, with a view to making education

Health services at the doorsteps of villagers—a Community Health Worker



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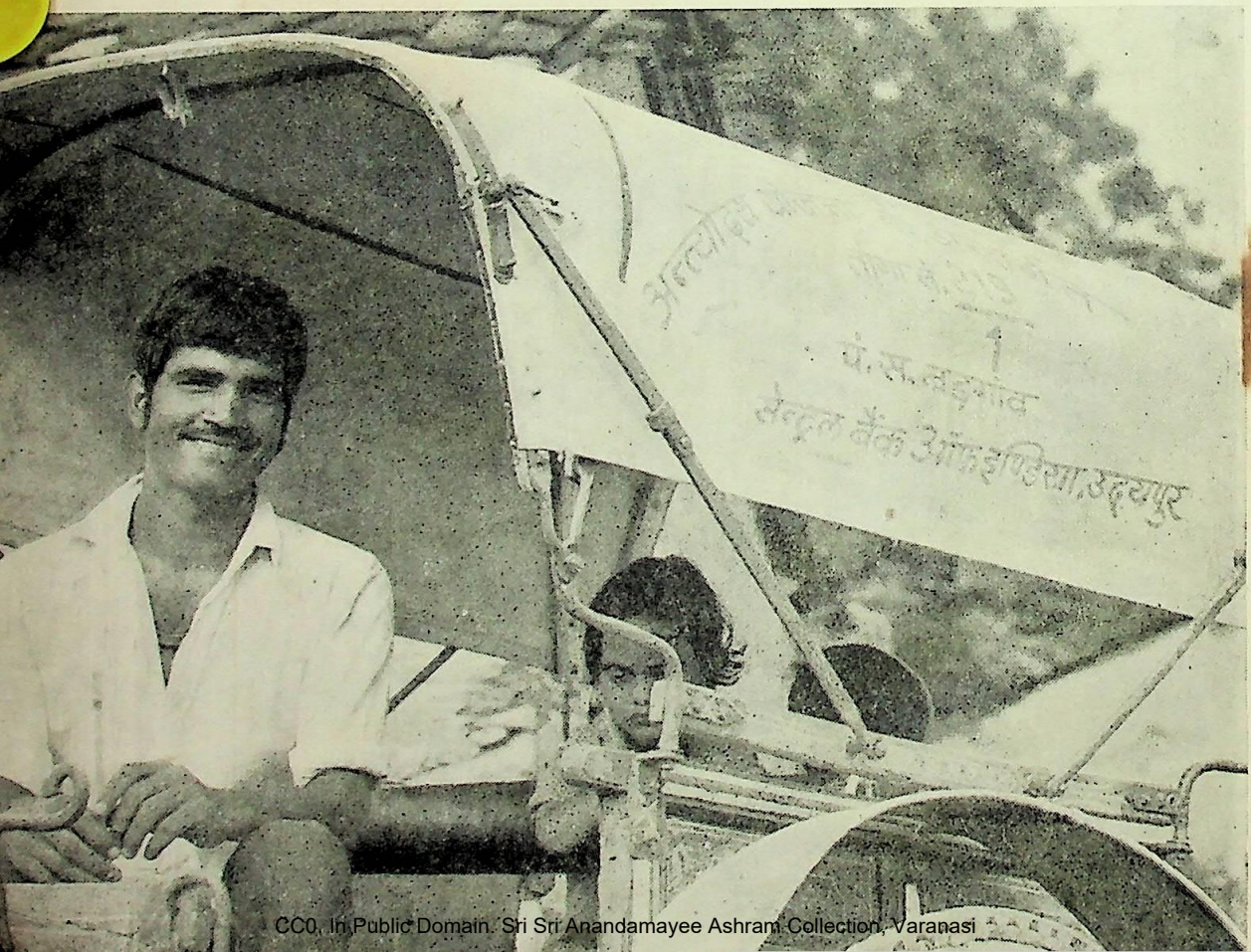
functional and related to the lives of the people and the environment. For women, functional literacy programmes are to be undertaken to impart educational and vocational skills to adult women.

Government recognises the necessity of making available to the rural community its basic minimum needs in the shape of drinking water supply, rural roads, health care, elementary and adult education (especially for women) and house sites for the homeless. Programmes have been approved for all of these. For example, the aim is to provide safe drinking water to

Helping the have-nots. Smiling young man who has been given a tonga under Antyodaya Scheme to enable him to earn his livelihood



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over 1,13,000 'problem' villages by March, 1981. Of these, 18,000 villages were covered last year. Also, housing for the weaker sections in both rural and urban areas is being provided, and a large amount is being specifically earmarked for rural housing.

With a view to providing health services at the door-steps of the villagers, the Rural Health Services Scheme envisages the provision of a community health worker in every village with a population of 1,000. The Scheme was launched on October 2, 1977 and more than 66,000 Community Health Workers have already been trained under the scheme. They are now back in their villages helping the people in the area of health and family welfare.

The Directive Principle which lists the improvement of public health as a primary duty of the State goes on to say that "in particular, the State shall endeavour to bring about prohibition of the consumption except for medicinal purposes of intoxicating drinks and of drugs which are injurious to health". This directive is now being earnestly and progressively implemented in most parts of the country.

It has been realised that even with all this effort, the benefits of economic development might not percolate to the poorest of the poor. To enable them also to emerge from the depths of poverty, the Antyodaya programme and similar schemes have been launched in several states. Under a typical Antyodaya programme, the five poorest families in each village are provided with such monetary and other help as may be appropriate in their individual circumstances.

Nourishing the Federal Structure

Our federal Constitution was given by its framers a number of provisions aimed at maintaining a fine balance between the spheres of the Union Government and the States. Over the years, these provisions had been slurred over because of the pre-dominance of one political party. The present Government has given due respect to the federal principle in the

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constitutional machinery for the betterment of Centre-States relations. The State Governments have been increasingly consulted on all matters where the Union interacts with them. These include problems of law and order, communal harmony, agricultural production and movement of foodgrains and essential commodities over inter-state boundaries.

The Planning Commission and the National Development Council have become living forums for Centre-States dialogues. Following extensive and sustained consultations between the Prime Minister and the Chief Ministers, the allocation of resources to the States by the Centre has been vastly liberalised.

Measures for dispersal of power and responsibility to the grass roots level, in order to achieve a more effective and decentralised system of rural planning and development, are being initiated in consultation with the States on the basis of the report submitted by the Ashoka Mehta Committee on the working of Panchayati Raj institutions

With a view to making the administrative services as broad-based as possible, a modified system of examinations for entry into the all-India services has been introduced. Candidates will be allowed to write in any of the languages of the Eighth Schedule.

In the Comity of Nations

Looking out of the country, the Government started by mending the fences and improving relations with the neighbouring countries. A series of initiatives in the last two years has improved bilateral relations and built up an atmosphere of trust and cooperation. Relations with Pakistan are now better than ever during the last 30 years. The agreement with Bangladesh on Farakka has helped to improve further the ties with that country. A new level of understanding and friendliness now governs our relations with Nepal, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan and Burma.

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The government has also taken steps to normalise relations with our biggest neighbour, China. With the exchange of Ambassadors, diplomatic relations have been re-established at the highest level. The External Affairs Minister visited Peking at the invitation of his Chinese counterpart in February 1979.

Better understanding between our country and our neighbours has laid the foundation for regional cooperation and stability. This is particularly so in the context of South East Asia with which India has ancient ties and no serious bilateral problems. Neglect of the region has been replaced by closer political, economic and cultural relations with all the countries of the region.

India's economic and technical cooperation has been further extended to the countries of South East Asia, West Asia (including the Arab world) and to other developing and non-aligned nations.

Attention has been paid also to the promotion of good relations with the major powers on the basis of constructive cooperation. As a result of the Prime Minister's visits to the U. S. S. R., the U. S. A. and some European countries, a warm and friendly interest in India has been created. As the Prime Minister told Parliament, "There is a wide appreciation of the constructive approach we have made to international issues and to the policy of genuine non-alignment."

The Janata government's foreign policy has thus restored the original thrust to the non-aligned policy, given it a balance and even-handedness and removed the distortions which had crept in. This has raised India's prestige abroad.

Conclusion

The foregoing is a brief survey of the numerous big and small measures with which the Janata Government has met the socio-politico-economic challenge of the times.

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It will be noticed that the effort has been to strengthen the forces of democracy, extend social justice to the minorities, the backward classes and the so called "untouchables", fortify national solidarity by respecting the federal structure of the Constitution and taking steps to build up the economy with due emphasis on the rural and agricultural sector which contributes the bulk of the gross national product.

India's rural population, in particular, nurtured in the last few years on a rising tide of expectations, has become extremely sensitive to economic issues, and tends to react sharply to delays in the redressal of both social and economic injustice. Violent incidents get more noticed and commented upon, thanks to the Government's restoration of freedom of expression. Again, as the centre of gravity of political processes shifts from the urban to the rural area, stresses and strains are bound to develop in the social and political fabric. In an authoritarian society, these would get forcibly suppressed, but in a democracy a certain amount of social upheaval is inevitable.

The government has met this social ferment by positive responses, and by trying to evolve a consensus on steps to fulfil felt needs—social, economic and political—rather than brushing them impatiently aside or suppressing dissent. It has thus acted as a government of the people, by the people and for the people.

The government has now been in office for two years. If the first year was a year of change, the second has been the year of determined and dedicated implementation of the objectives it has set before itself. The catalogue of achievements is something any government can be proud of. The people have had evidence particularly of the Government's determination to promote the welfare of the weaker sections of society and promote the all round development of the country. They can look forward with renewed hopes to the government's attempts to usher in a happy future for the citizens of this ancient land.

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Facts at a Glance

* To safeguard the freedom of the press, the Prevention of Publication of Objectionable Matters Act 1976 repealed.
* The Parliamentary Proceedings (Protection of Publication) Act restored.
* The Rural Health Services Scheme to provide health services at the doorsteps of villagers launched.
* Minorities Commission set up.
* The District Industries Centre Scheme to provide all the services and facilities to the entrepreneurs at one place for setting up small and village industries initiated.
* Press Commission set up.
* Commission on Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes set up.
* MISA repealed.
* The National Adult Education Programme to cover 100 million adult illiterates within a period of five years launched.
* Committee for Backward Classes set up.
* GNP went up by about 6 per cent during 1977-78 as compared with 1.6 per cent in 1976-77.

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* The price situation has been stable, despite a 12 per cent increase in money supply.
* Foodgrains production has risen to a record 125.6 million tonnes.
* The area under irrigation increased by 2.6 million hectares in 1977-78, a record for any country in a single year.
* The 'Food for Work' programme has created employment equivalent to 400 million man-days.
* The total outlay in 1978-83 Plan for rural development would be raised to 43 per cent as against 37.5 per cent in the Fifth Plan period.
* For Minimum Needs Programmes like drinking water, adult education, rural roads, rural electrification, house sites for the landless etc., the outlay would be stepped up to Rs. 4,180 crores as against Rs. 800 crores in the years 1974-78.
* Industrial growth rate for 1978-79 is estimated at about 8 per cent.
* Power generation in 1978-79 has increased by 13 per cent over the preceding year.

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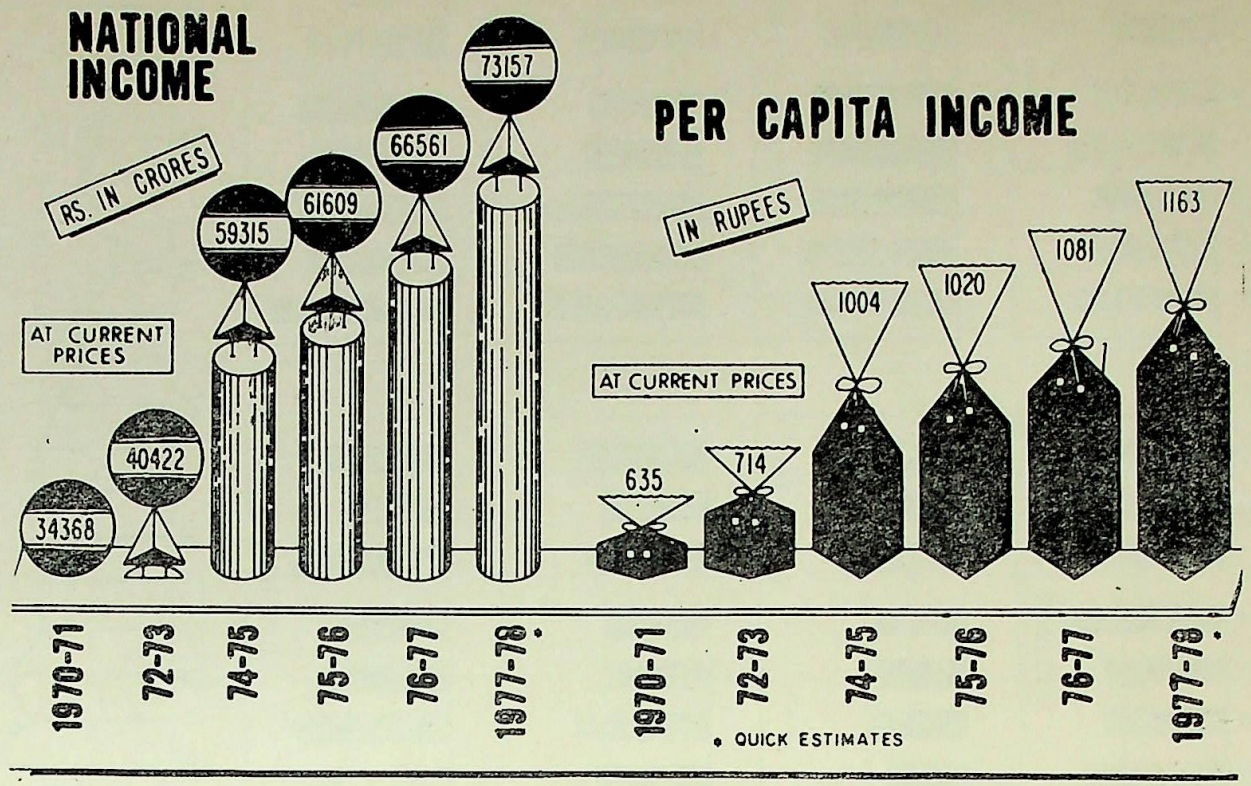

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AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION

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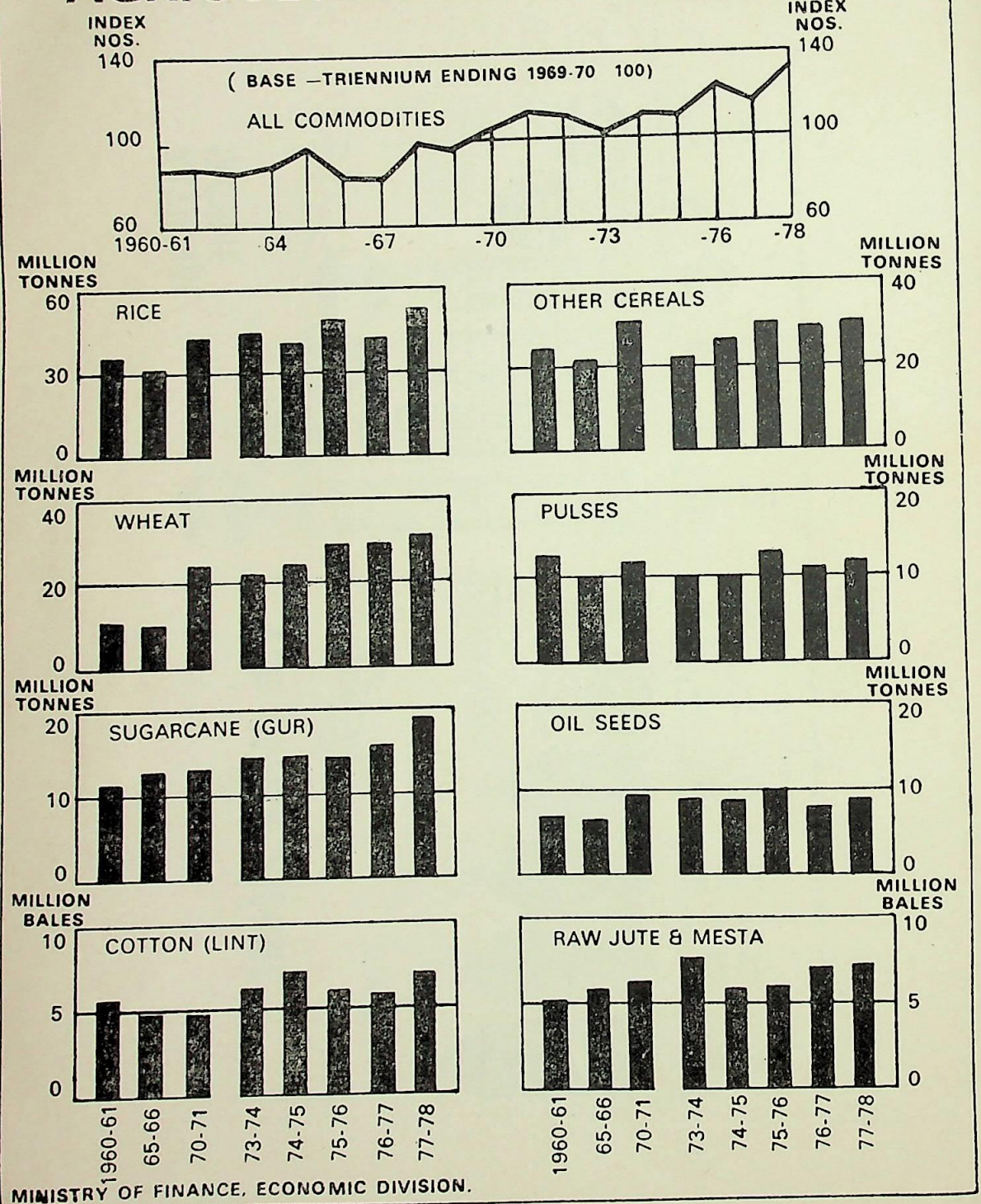

MINISTRY OF FINANCE, ECONOMIC DIVISION.

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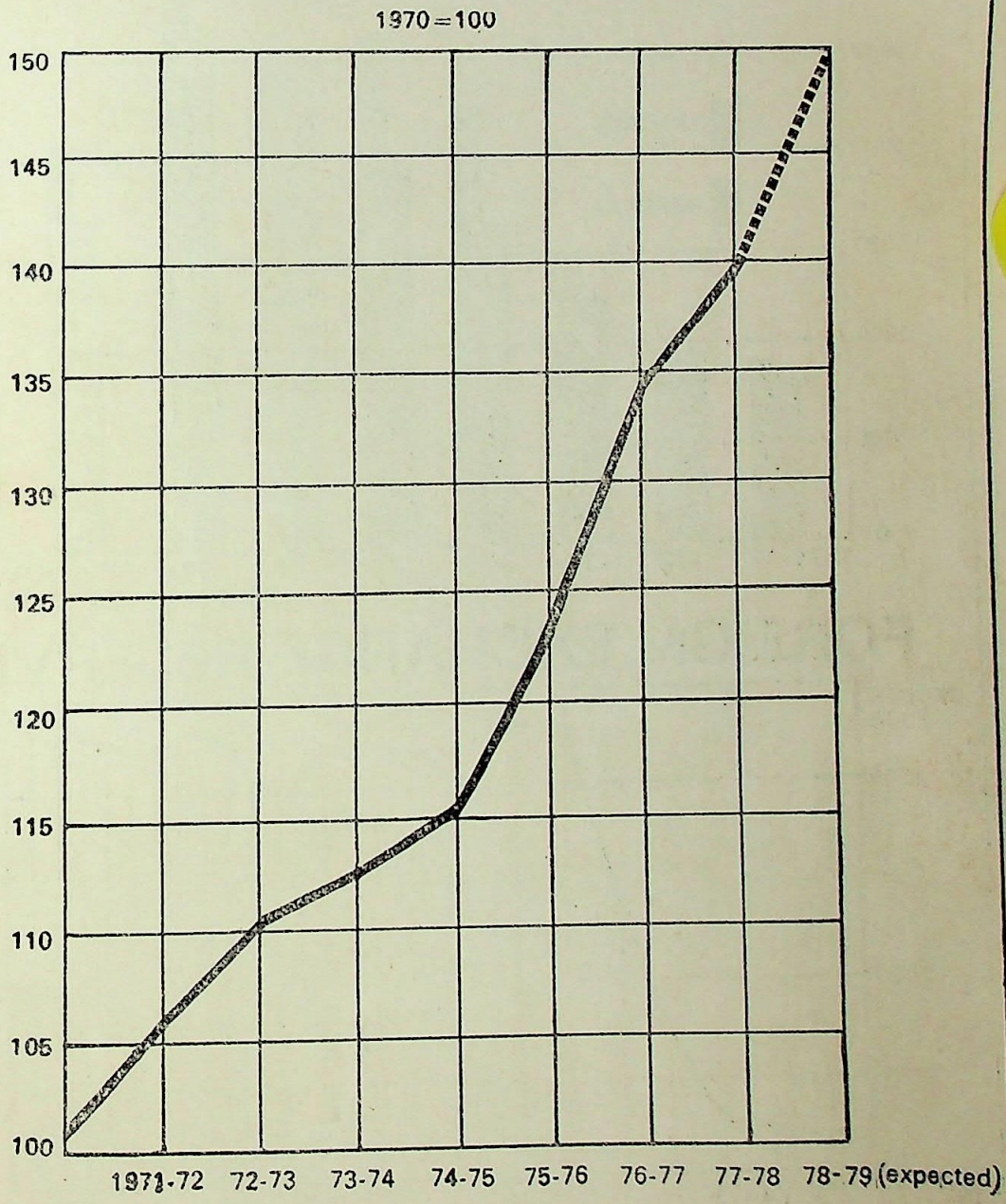

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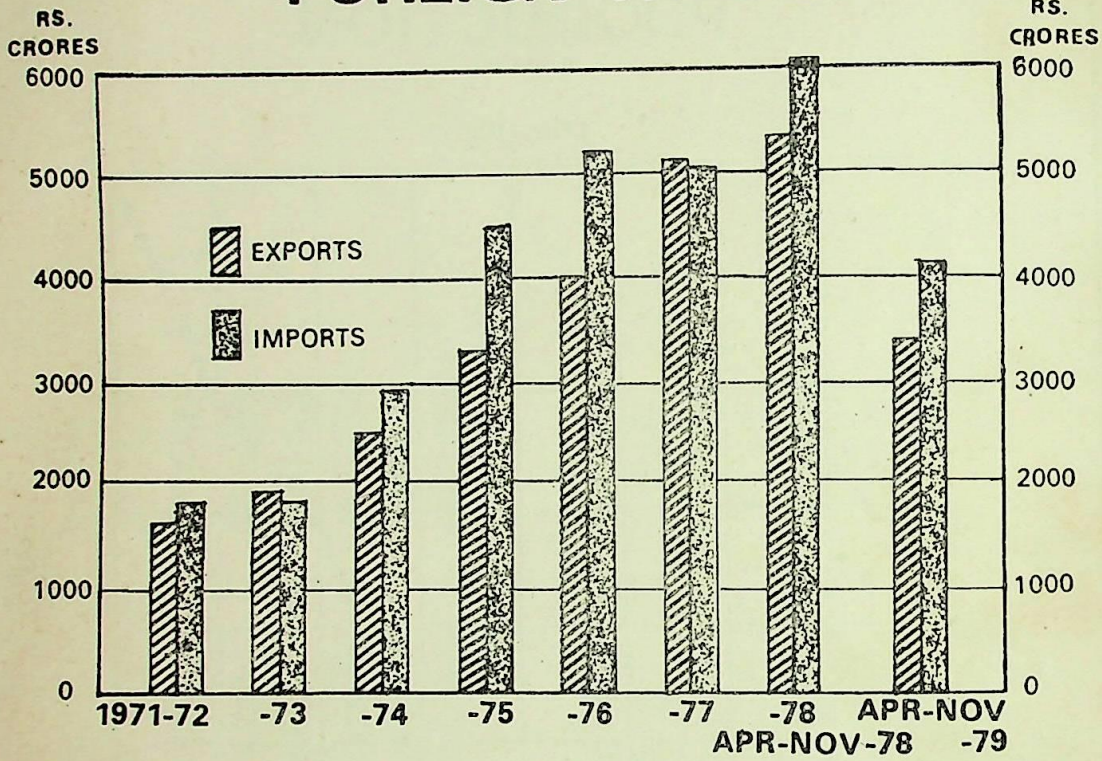
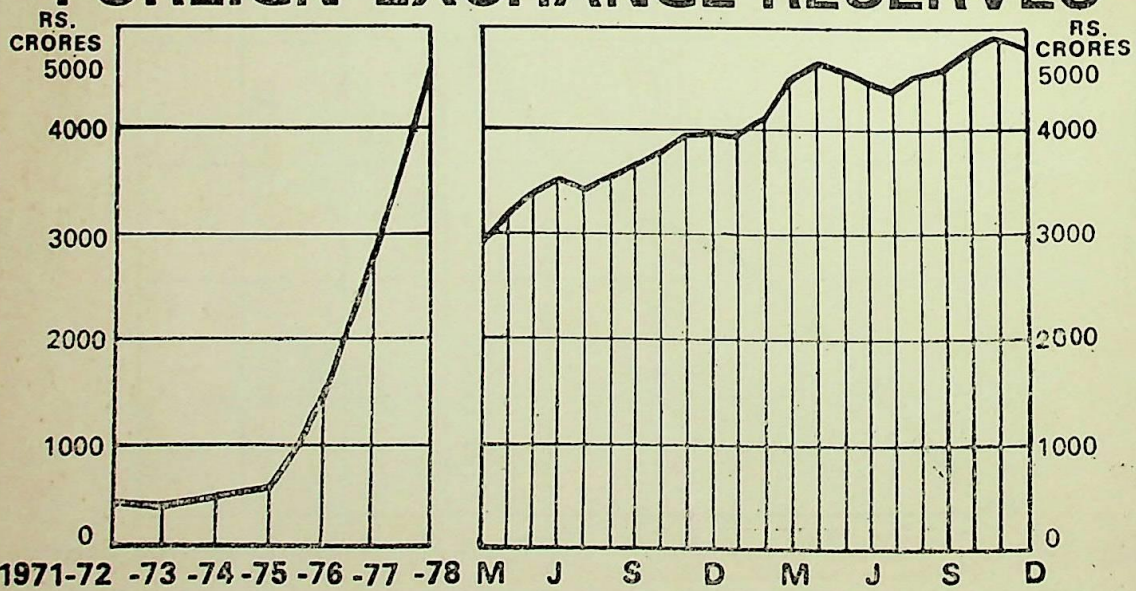
FOREIGN TRADE



FOREIGN EXCHANGE RESERVES



MINISTRY OF FINANCE ECONOMIC DIVISION

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General view of the oil refinery at Trombay near Bombay

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